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Duty of a Neutral Nation



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THE DUTY OF A NEUTRAL NATION
A WORD OF ADMONITION ADDED TO THE
WARNING OF THE PRESIDENT

SPEECH
OF
SENATOR WILLIAM J. STONE
OF MISSOURI

IN THE
SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 9, 1914



WASHINGTON
1914

60621—13952



SPEECH
OF
SENATOR WILLIAM J. STONE.

DUTY OF A NEUTRAL.

Mr. STONE. Mr. President, as the Senate is taking recesses from day to day, in consequence of which the morning hour is dispensed with, I find that if I say what I wish to say about a matter that I consider of great importance I am compelled to interpose at some juncture like this. So I crave the indulgence of the Senate at this time that I may submit some observations respecting the duty of the American Government, and especially of the American people, during the terrible struggle now raging throughout Europe.

Some weeks ago the President of the United States gave out a most timely and patriotic address in which he set forth with great clearness the duty incumbent upon a neutral government and people in emergencies like that now confronting us. He appealed with great earnestness to our people to observe their obligations of neutrality with strict integrity, and warned them against the embarrassments that would arise during the progress of the war and of the evil effects that would follow thereafter if we failed to keep our pledge of neutrality with the utmost good faith. The effect of this appeal of the President became instantly manifest and was in every way most excellent. Undoubtedly that address has exercised a fine restraining influence upon the conduct, and even upon the expressions, of the great body of the people. But as this stupendous conflict progresses from week to week, growing in tragic intensity and horror, it has become the one all-absorbing subject of public thought and attention. And now, I regret to say, that we have everywhere increasing evidences that many of our people are being more and more divided into groups, and that these groups are becoming more and more sympathetic and outspoken partisans of the one or the other side of those engaged in this titanic conflict; and especially is this true of a large number of our most important and influential daily and periodical publications. Because of this, Mr. President, I feel that it would be wise and opportune at this time to add a word of admonition to the warning sounded by the Chief Magistrate.

Mr. President, the citizenship of this Republic is strikingly composite in character. The sturdy descendants of the Puritan and Cavalier—the old Revolutionary stock—are happily still numerically strong enough to exercise a controlling influence on the destinies of the Republic. At the same time we face the tremendous fact—for just now especially it is a tremendous fact—that mingled among those descended from the original American stock are millions of men and women who have im-

migrated from Europe, established homes in these States, and assumed the dignity and responsibility of American citizenship. They have become a permanent and essential part of our people, and have entered fully into all the social, industrial, and political activities of the country. Every important country of Europe is represented in this naturalized foreign-born population, or in their immediate offspring. All political divisions of Great Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, Italy, Greece, and the Balkan States are represented in the vast aggregate of this foreign-born population. As they look upon the frightful panorama of this war, with its awful scenes of fire and flood, famine and death, it is not only natural but almost inevitable that the sympathies of these people should be poured forth in strong currents upon their respective fatherlands. It is only human that this should be so, and none in fact could expect less. But, Mr. President, so far as lies within my power, I wish to admonish these, my fellow citizens, and to impress upon them a renewed realization of the supreme and all-important fact that they are above all American citizens. I know that every Senator here will approve and sympathize with me when I appeal to these American citizens of every nationality to keep steadily before their minds the obligation and responsibility that they are under to first serve and promote the interests, welfare, and honor of our own Government and people. Therein lies the first duty of citizenship and the first obligation of loyalty. Sympathy is an impulse of the heart and mind and is usually beyond human control. Moreover, sympathy for our kindred in time of stress is so natural and altogether so honorable and ennobling that no man with a spark of that kindred feeling of brotherhood common to all mankind would wish to eradicate or suppress it. But lest we forget I would again admonish my countrymen that sympathy is one thing, while that kind of aggressive partisanship which divides us into warring factions and stirs within us the hot blood of battle is another and very different thing. Above all, we must hold fast to our own national duty and obligation, and any man who falls short of that falls below the standard of good citizenship.

Another thing to which I desire to call especial attention and emphasize is the partisan attitude being assumed by many of the great publications of this country. Knowing how potent these publications can be in creating public opinion and in fomenting factional strife, it is natural that those upon whom the responsibilities of government are cast should look upon this particular phase of partisanship with deep solicitude and apprehension. The managers of these great publications, even far more than individual citizens in more private walks, should be very mindful of the patriotic duty they owe their own country in this great emergency. It is a source of profound regret that so many influential journals and periodicals are beginning to take sides in this mighty contest, and are beginning not only to express their sympathies for the one side or the other, but to indulge in harsh criticism and sometimes in denunciations of the Governments and the armies of those with whom they are not in accord. This is not only hurtful at home in exciting animosities among our own people, but it creates bad impressions and arouses hot resentments abroad; and more-

over it should be manifest to every man that this sort of thing works estrangements and makes free and cordial intercourse between this Government and the Governments of the nations at war more difficult and embarrassing. How can any patriotic and right-thinking American forget that ours is the only one of the great world powers holding the enviable but delicate position of absolute neutrality? To that policy, founded upon the love of peace and springing from an honest desire to be of service to mankind, we are pledged by the most solemn assurance, and to a strict observance of that pledge we are bound by every consideration of national interest and honor. It is amazing that great editors and publishers should so forget the supreme duty they owe to their own Government as to become callous about and thoughtless of the Nation's plighted faith, and to indulge in vituperative attacks upon the rulers or the governments of any of the belligerent powers, or seek to arouse against any of them a hostile public sentiment in this country.

That sort of thing can not stay the hand of war nor change the issue on a single battle field, but it will provoke bitter feeling and lead to criminations and recriminations among our own people, thereby exciting feuds and endless discord that it will take years to silence; and it will excite against us a hostile spirit among those nations which may be led to believe that in sympathy and judgment we are against them, and that our profession of impartial neutrality is empty and insincere. How can any man forget that each of the great nations embroiled in this frightful war, relying upon our neutrality and believing in our profound concern for its welfare, has placed its diplomatic interests in the hands of our Government? Thus we have voluntarily assumed the delicate task of mediator between these various powers. As the representative of all, and professing impartial and equal friendship for all, this great Nation stands towering before the world with its hands extended to promote the cause of peace whenever and wherever opportunity offers. With our Government holding this position is it not almost wicked for any American to thrust himself into this tremendous struggle in such a way as to weaken our power for good? Is it not perfectly plain that our power for effective mediation will be diminished if ever any one of the Governments vitally concerned becomes convinced that in our hearts we are unfriendly to it and would rejoice at any ill befalling it? And then looking beyond the end of the war, will not the spirit of resentment and universal ill will linger among the people of that nation? Remember, it is a hard thing, my countrymen, for your Government to maintain its attitude of strict neutrality and discharge the solemn duties incident to that position unless you yourselves stand by your Government and nobly uphold its hands. Why should any American at this time attack the Kaiser and the German Government and offend the German people? Whatever anyone may think of the policies and methods of the German Emperor and his Government, this is not the time to give expression to his views in offensive terms. And here let me remark that whatever else may be said of the German Kaiser, this much must be conceded: That in all Europe no man exceeds him in commanding ability, in individual force, and in devotion to his Fatherland. And whatever may be said in criticism of the

German people, it must be conceded that nowhere on earth can be found a more frugal, industrious, progressive, home-loving, patriotic, and devoted people.

The masterful work they have performed in creating a mighty empire and in making it the seat of industry, of literature, of art, and of all the things that conduce to a high civilization is one of the marvels of this generation. We have millions of Germans mingled in the population of this Republic, and they furnish constant and convincing proof of the high type and character of the German people. There are ties of blood and fellowship and memories running back through our history to the Revolution that should stir within our hearts a warm attachment for the great people along the Rhine who have given the world so many evidences of their just claim to greatness. Again, why should any American go into the open to attack Great Britain or France? The great body of our original American stock sprang from the British Isles—England, Ireland, and Scotland—and the ties of blood binding Americans to the people of Great Britain should be strong enough to restrain all Americans from any act or word offensive to this wonderful and mighty nation—a nation having few parallels in great achievement throughout the history of the world. Why should any American go into the open to speak ill of France, the land of Lafayette? What thrilling chapters have the genius, the learning, and the valor of France written on the pages of history. And so, Mr. President, I might run this line of comment through all the nations involved in this terrible and ever to be lamented tragedy. We are, and we should be, a friend to all these nations and all these unhappy peoples in this day of strife, when all of them stand in such woeful need of a powerful and honest friend. Never in human history has a great nation had such a magnificent opportunity as ours to perform a glorious work for mankind and to set a noble example for the guidance of the human race. All we have to do is to keep faith with ourselves and with our friends, always waiting and watching, as we should be, for opportunities to render some service to those who are suffering from the sanguinary and destructive turbulence with which our friends and kindred abroad are so beset. To successfully accomplish this work we have to do, it is vitally necessary that not only our Government but our people should firmly maintain our position of absolute neutrality.

Mr. President, I clipped the following from a Washington paper last Sunday:

Mr. Henry White, late ambassador to France and for 20 years a distinguished figure in American diplomacy, has reiterated from Copenhagen his advice to his countrymen to remember that this war is not of our making and none of our business. As Mr. and Mrs. White are awaiting a ship to bring them home after passing the summer with their son-in-law and only daughter—

Who are subjects of the German Empire—

they may be credited with the highest patriotism in urging strict neutrality for all Americans.

This timely and patriotic utterance of this eminent American diplomat voices the spirit that should animate all Americans. How profoundly I wish that his admonition might find lodgment in all our hearts and set the measure for our utterances and our conduct.

From the same paper I also clipped what I now read:

AMBASSADOR PROTESTS.

The Turkish ambassador to-day vehemently protested against "the jokes and jibes aimed at Turkey in the American newspapers."

"These attacks show a great lack of feeling and tact," the ambassador declared, "in connection with such a grave matter as events which may threaten the destiny of nations. Turkey has come in for a great deal of pleasantry, and, speaking on behalf of the Turkish Government, I must protest."

The ambassador was without cable communications with his Government to-day, but he said Turkey still protested her neutrality.

Mr. President, I confess myself ashamed that there should be American publications in sufficient number pursuing a course that makes it necessary for an ambassador of a friendly nation accredited to our Government to make this public protest. I am sure that whatever has been done in this behalf was not done because of ill will or out of any desire to offend; rather it is the result of thoughtlessness, or the absence of a proper sense of responsibility.

Mr. President, it was because of just such things as this, and because of such things as I have ventured to complain about, indulged in to excess during the Russo-Japanese War, that almost cost us the friendship of Russia—a friendship that had become traditional. Since that war the relations between Russia and the United States have unfortunately not been characterized by that degree of amity which had prevailed for decades before. This causeless disturbance of our friendly relations with Russia, foolishly provoked by thoughtless conduct on the part of our own people, has worked seriously to our disadvantage. Particularly did we find this to be so when we came to negotiate with Russia to bring about more favorable conditions for the Jewish people in that Empire. It is hard to break through the crust of prejudice and habit and aid those who suffer when we attempt to negotiate with a nation whose Government and people regard us with suspicion and disfavor. It is always easier to deal with one who looks upon us as a friend. It behooves us therefore to so act in all things as to avoid the danger ever present in this grave emergency of arousing a deep-seated resentment and prejudice against us on the part of any of the nations embroiled in this terrible war. Let us keep true to the course we have marked out for ourselves. If only we do this, we will perform a part in this stupendous era of world-making history that will redound forever to the honor and glory of our great Republic.

In addition to what I have said, there are other reasons founded on commercial and economical considerations that should urge us to maintain the most prudent and conservative form of neutrality; but I would consider it unworthy to place this appeal to my fellow citizens upon that ground. Mere selfish considerations looking to profit and gain for ourselves for performing a duty which should be performed solely for higher and nobler reasons should not intrude themselves upon our thought when we are deliberating upon opportunities for doing something for the good of mankind and for the honor of our country. Possible commercial benefits to us raise considerations wholly apart from what I have been discussing. If, indeed, the misfortunes of war, so destructive to others, should eventuate in commercial and business advantages to our people, there is

no reason why we should not in a proper spirit avail ourselves of opportunities coming in this way to the fullest extent. But aside from all that, and far above all that, we should keep absolute faith with the nations of the world and deeply and truthfully impress all of them with a positive belief in our sincerity and in our desire to grasp hands with them in a spirit of honest friendship, and to aid all of them to the utmost in every way we may find open for such a service.

Mr. GALLINGER. Mr. President, I have listened with profound interest to the remarks just delivered by the distinguished Senator from Missouri [Mr. Stone]. It seems to me they came at the right time and in the right spirit, and that we all ought to appreciate their force and the necessity of giving heed to them. I rise to ask that they may be printed as a Senate document, and that 5,000 additional copies may be printed for the use of the Senate document room.

The VICE PRESIDENT. Is there objection? The Chair hears none, and it is so ordered.

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